

# ANTI-CHRIST

## PART X

### THE RETURN OF JUDAH

**A**s Judah faced the prospect of returning to their Land, the nations continued their inexorable decline into paganism. The temple to Diana was built in Ephesus and came in modern times to be called the third wonder of the world. Confucius was inspiring the sacred books of China. Prince Siddhartha Gautama was developing the Buddhist religion in India. Rome was about to be faced with rebellion against Tarquin the Proud, setting the stage for establishment of the Roman Republic. Yet the primary focus of anti-Christ was upon one nation in particular. If anti-Christ could thwart God's plans for Israel he could unite the world against YHWH and establish his kingdom over the entire earth. A critical period in Israel's history unfolded when the time for God's promise to restore Israel to the Land had come.

When Cyrus of Persia defeated Babylonia in 539 B.C., he issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. He was following the Persian philosophy of conquest that the best way to govern foreign nations was to allow them to continue in their cultural and religious traditions. But more than this, he was compelled by God to fulfill Jeremiah's prophecy that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order that the word of YHWH spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, YHWH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: 'YHWH God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has charged me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all His people? YHWH his God be with him, and let him go up.'" (2 Chronicles 36:22-23)

Cyrus returned all the Israelite temple artifacts that Nebuchadnezzar had placed in the temple of his god after capturing Judah. But with the laying of the new temple's foundation by Zerubbabel came both joy and sorrow.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were old men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice, and many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people. Because the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard far off. (Ezra 3:12-13)

Having come back to their homeland, the Jews encountered the inhabitants that had taken over. Those new inhabitants did not like the idea of the Jews again gaining strength in their midst, and they plotted to sabotage the rebuilding of the temple. At first they feigned friendship, offering to help build the temple, but Zerubbabel and all the heads of the tribes of Israel told them that they had no part in building the temple to YHWH.

Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counselors against them in order to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius<sup>1</sup> king of Persia. (Ezra 4:4-5)

If there were ever a reason for anti-Christ to strive against the plans of YHWH, this was among the most important. If he could prevent the temple from being built he would accomplish two important victories: 1) he would prove YHWH false in His promise to restore Judah and the temple; 2) he would prevent Israel from having a place to worship the true God.

1 This Darius is not the same as Darius the Mede who first conquered Babylonia, but Darius Hytaspes, 3<sup>rd</sup> Persian king to succeed Cyrus.

For several years anti-Christ succeeded in preventing the temple from being rebuilt. Upon the death of Cyrus, his son Cambyses, also known as Artaxerxes, inherited the disputes lodged against Judah. After receiving a letter indicting the Jews as rebellious people who should be prevented from building the temple, Cambyses ordered the rebuilding to cease. No further work was done until the reign of the Persian king Darius when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged Zerubbabel to take up the project again.

Then Tatnai, governor of Trans-Euphrates, with Shethar-Boznai and other officials of his realm, were led by their anti-Christ spirit to confront Zerubbabel and his workers demanding to know who authorized the building of the temple. After hearing the account of how Judah had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar for their sins, and how Cyrus had given a decree for them to be sent back to build the temple, Tatnai sent a letter to king Darius recounting Zerubbabel's story and asking that a search be made among the royal archives to see if it were true.

After having a search made of the royal archives and discovering that Cyrus had indeed ordered the temple to be rebuilt, Darius then issued his own decree that no one was to hinder the construction any longer:

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls where the treasures were laid up in Babylon. And there was found at Achmetha, in the palace that is in the province of the Medes, a roll, and therein was a record thus written:

"In the first year of Cyrus the king the same Cyrus the king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, 'Let the house be built—the place where they offered sacrifices—and let its foundations be strongly laid, its height sixty cubits, and its breadth sixty cubits, with three rows of great stones, and a row of new timber. And let the expenses be given from the king's house.

"And also let the golden and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from out of the temple that is at Jerusalem, and brought to Babylon, be restored and returned to the temple that is at Jerusalem, every one to its place, and place them in the house of God."

"Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-Boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites that are beyond the river, stay far from there. Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in its place.

"Moreover I make a decree that you shall do to the elders of these Jews for the building of this house of God, that from the king's goods, even from the tribute beyond the river, forthwith expenses be given to these men so that they not be hindered. And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of Heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests that are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail so that they may offer sacrifices of sweet savors to the God of Heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.

"I have also made a decree, that whoever changes this word, let timber be pulled down from his house, and being set up, let him be hanged on, and let his house be made a dunghill for this.

"And the God that has caused His name to dwell there destroy all kings and people that put in their hand to alter and to destroy this house of God that is at Jerusalem.

"I Darius have made a decree; let it be done with speed."

Then Tatnai, governor on this side of the river, Shethar-Boznai, and their companions, quickly did according to that which Darius the king had sent. (Ezra 6:1-13)

Nothing like a little incentive to change one's mind.

With this, the opposition relented. It had been some fourteen years since work on the temple had ceased, but now the work could continue.

But anti-Christ was not finished. He induced the Jews themselves to put off working on the temple in order to attend to their own needs and comforts. As a result, God withheld blessings from them. Then the Word of God came to the people through Haggai, telling them the reason they were having problems with their crops and livestock:

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, the word of YHWH came through Haggai the prophet to Shealtiel's son Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and to Josedech's son Joshua, the high priest, saying, "YHWH of hosts speaks this, saying, 'These people say, "The time has not come, the time that YHWH's house should be built."'"

Then the word of YHWH came through Haggai the prophet, saying, "Is it time for you, O you, to dwell in your roofed houses, and this house lie waste?

"Now therefore, YHWH of hosts says this: 'Consider your ways. You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but you do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but there is no one warm; and he who earns wages earns wages to put it into a bag with holes.'

"YHWH of hosts says this: 'Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified,' says YHWH."

"You looked for much, and, look, it came to little; and when you brought it home I blew upon it. Why?" says YHWH of hosts. 'Because of My house that is ruined, and every man of you runs to his own house. Therefore the sky above you is kept from dew, and the earth is kept from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the newwine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground brings forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the work of the hands.'"

Then Shealtiel's son Zerubbabel, and Josedech's son Joshua, the high priest—with all the remnant of the people—obeyed the voice of their God YHWH, and the words of the prophet Haggai as their God YHWH had sent him, and the people feared before YHWH.

Then YHWH's messenger Haggai spoke YHWH's message to the people, saying, "I am with you," says YHWH."

And YHWH stirred up the spirit of Shealtiel's son Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Josedech's son Joshua, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people, and they came and worked in the house of their God, YHWH of hosts, in the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king. (Haggai 1:1-15)

God expected that the Jews would have to build themselves homes and take care of their needs before they could put themselves wholly into the task of rebuilding His house. But they had procrastinated for too long. The work of the temple became less important as time passed, and they grew accustomed to their comforts.

How like they are we at times. We purpose to do many things for the Lord, but the cares of the world and our own comforts get in the way. Before we know it, far too much time has passed and we've missed, or almost missed, the opportunity to serve Him.

Although the people did respond to Haggai's prophecy and put themselves into the work of building the new temple, those who remembered the majestic beauty of Solomon's temple wept because of the smaller and less ornate qualities of its replacement. They were not aware that the real glory of this temple would not be its materials, but the entrance of their Messiah into its gates at God's ordained time. So God, speaking through Haggai to Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant that were in the Land, gave them this assurance:

"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"

"Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel," says YHWH, "and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, high priest, and be strong, all you people of the Land," says YHWH, "and work, for I am with you," says YHWH of hosts. "According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My spirit remains among you. Do not fear."

"For YHWH of hosts says this: 'Yet once, in a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all nations. And the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says YHWH of hosts."

"The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says YHWH of hosts.

"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former," says YHWH of hosts, "and in this place I will give peace," says YHWH of hosts." (Haggai 2:3-9)

The "desire of nations" is the Messiah, not only of Israel, but of the whole earth. All nations will receive the blessings of Messiah when He returns to establish His millennial Kingdom. In the meantime, when He came the first time, He entered the temple and purged it for the sake of His Father's name (Matthew 21:12-13).

In the year 516 B.C., exactly seventy years after the destruction of Solomon's temple, Zerubbabel's temple was completed. God's promise of restoration of the people to the Land was also completed in exactly seventy years from the time they were taken to Babylonia. Despite anti-Christ's many attempts to destroy God's prophets, His people, and His plans for restoration, all things came about as prophesied. It may even be said that God took into account the delays caused by Satan's attempts to thwart His plans, thus fulfilling His prophecies in the times specified.

Yet many exiles chose not to return to the Land, and so remained in the Diaspora, their descendants scattered throughout the nations until their Messiah brings them all back after His return. Just what prompted those exiles who chose to remain is not stated in Scripture, but it would seem that they succumbed to the spirit of the world—the anti-Christ spirit—choosing to live among the heathen rather than in close proximity to their God in His temple.

During this time of transition for Judah, Zechariah received his prophecies, many of which relate to the coming of the Messiah, the manner of His death, even His betrayal for thirty pieces of silver. Zechariah's apocalyptic and millennial prophecies for the future of Jerusalem are a guide to how anti-Christ will oppose the will of God in the last days.

It was also during this time that God visited Daniel again to tell him of the fall of the Persian Empire and the rise of the Grecian Empire, as well as other future events that would lead to the last days of this age (Daniel 10:1-12:13).

Upon the death of Darius, his son Xerxes I inherited his empire. Although taking harsh measures through taxation against Egypt and Greece, he seems content to allow the Jews alone to live in peace, perhaps in response to the decrees of Cyrus and Darius. But in the third year of Xerxes's reign anti-Christ made a strong attempt to destroy the Jews in Persia. That attempt is recorded in the Book of Esther.

Xerxes held a banquet for all the people at Shushan, the city from which he reigned. He commanded the seven eunuchs who served him to bring Queen Vashti so that he could display her beauty to his subjects. When Vashti refused his command he was counseled by the nobles of Persia and Media to exile Vashti lest her example cause the women in his kingdom to rebel against their husbands, and replace her with another woman possessing greater beauty than that of Vashti. Among the candidates for Xerxes new wife was Hadassah, a cousin of Mordecai, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin who was living at Shushan. She was taken to Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of his harem.

So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together at Shushan the palace into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was also brought into the king's house, into the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.

And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness from him, and he quickly gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were suitable to be given to her from out of the king's house. And he gave her and her maids the best place in the house of the women.

Esther had not revealed her people or her tribe, for Mordecai had charged her that she should not reveal it.

And every day, Mordecai walked in front of the court of the women's house in order to know how Esther did, and what would become of her.

Now when every maid's turn came to go in to king Ahasuerus,<sup>2</sup> after she had been twelve months according to the manner of the women (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors, and with other things for the purifying of the women). Then in this manner every maiden came to the king: whatever she desired was given to her to go with her out of the house of the women to the king's house.

In the evening she went, and the next day she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, who kept the concubines. She came in to the king no longer unless the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, came to go in to the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all those who looked at her.

So Esther was taken to king Ahasuerus, into his royal house, in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. (Esther 2:8-17)

Thus were set in motion God's plan to thwart an evil attempt by anti-Christ to destroy God's people.

In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those who kept the door, were angry, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And this was known to Mordecai, who told it to Esther the queen, and Esther informed the king of it in Mordecai's name.

And when inquiry was made of the matter, it was found out. Therefore they were both hanged on a tree, and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

After these things king Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow or give him reverence.

Then the king's servants who were in the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's commandment?"

Now it came to pass, when they spoke daily to him, and he did not listen to them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew.<sup>3</sup>

And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or give him reverence, then Haman was full of wrath. And he thought in scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had revealed to him the people of Mordecai. Therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar. And Haman said to king Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are different from all people. Neither do they keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not for the king's profit to put up with them.

"If it pleases the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. And the king said to Haman, "The silver is given to you—the people also—to do with them as it seems good to you."

Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the king's scribes were called, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded to the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to its writing, and to every people after their language; it was written in the name of king Ahasuerus, and sealed with the king's ring.

And the letters were sent by mail into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.

The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published to all people so that they would be ready for that day.

- 2 Xerxes is also called Ahasuerus, meaning "Mighty." This is a title that was given to many Persian kings, and was not his proper name.
- 3 The Jews would bow to no one but the true God.

The mail went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed. (Esther 2:21-3:15)

The Jews and all Israel had suffered many things in their history up to this point, but never since Pharaoh's attempt during the Exodus had anyone attempted to commit total genocide against God's people. Anti-Christ must surely have understood God's prophecies concerning Israel's Messiah, and he knew the time was nearing when the Messiah would come. At this time, just prior to the culmination of the revealed Word of God to Israel as a people, anti-Christ determined to once-and-for-all eliminate any possibility of God's prophecies coming to pass.

But God also had a plan.

When Mordecai learned of the king's command to destroy all the Jews in his kingdom, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes as was the custom for mourning a great loss. He also continued to sit in the king's gate, which was not lawful while wearing sackcloth.

When Esther heard of it she sent word to Mordecai by Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, to ask the reason. He sent word back to tell her of the king's decree, and to charge her to plead to the king for his and his people's safety. Then a terrible decision had to be made:

Again Esther spoke to Hatach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, know that whoever is not called—whether man or woman—comes to the king into the inner court, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter so that he may live. But I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days."

And they told Esther's words to Mordecai.

Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, "Do not think within yourself that you shall escape in the king's house, any more than all the Jews. For if you altogether hold your peace at this time, then enlargement and deliverance shall arise to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house shall be destroyed. And who knows whether you came to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Then Esther bade them to return this answer to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and you fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I also and my maidens will fast likewise, and so I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish.

So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him. (Esther 4:10-17)

At first Esther was reluctant to obey Mordecai for fear of her life. But Mordecai knew that God would not allow His people to be utterly destroyed, but would bring them help from some other place. He prophesied that if Esther did not do as he said, she would certainly perish along with her family, even though the Jews would be rescued. Esther understood the consequences, but preferred to risk the king's displeasure rather than God's.

On the third day Esther put on her royal clothes and stood in the inner court of the king's house. When the king saw her he extended his scepter to her and asked what she desired. Esther did not immediately tell the king her true petition, but created a ruse to expose Haman's plot. She asked that the king and Haman come to a banquet that she had prepared for him. So the king called for Haman to come quickly to the banquet. There the king offered to grant to Esther any petition she asked of him. Esther replied that she would ask her petition at another banquet she would prepare for him and Haman the next day.

Then Haman went away joyfully, but when he saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and Mordecai did not bow to him, Haman was full of indignation. So when he got home he called for his friends, and for Zeresh his wife, bragging of his great fortunes and many children, and how the king had promoted him above all others in the kingdom. He also boasted that Queen Esther had invited him alone to a banquet with the king, and that he was invited alone with the king the next day for another banquet. Yet he conveyed that all this meant nothing as long as Mordecai the Jew sat at the king's gate refusing to honor him. So Zeresh and his friends advised him to have a gallows made and to ask the king the next day to have Mordecai hanged.

That night the king was troubled and could not sleep. God was prompting him to review the book of records. It was found that Mordecai had warned the king of the plot by Bigthana and Teresh to kill him. So Xerxes asked what had been done to reward Mordecai, to which his servants answered that nothing had been done for him. At that point in time Haman decided to approach the king to ask for Mordecai to be hanged. His timing was impeccable. According to God's timing. This is so great.

And the king said, "Who is in the court?"

Now Haman had come into the outward court of the king's house to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's servants said to him, "Look, Haman stands in the court."

And the king said, "Let him come in."

So Haman came in. And the king said to him, "What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?"

Now Haman thought in his heart, "To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?"

And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the king uses to wear, and the horse that the king rides upon, and the royal crown that is set upon his head, and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes so that they may array the man with whom the king delights to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor'".

Then the king said to Haman, "Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as you have said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken."

Then Haman [certainly mortified] took the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor."

And Mordecai again came to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house mourning, and having his head covered.

And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai is of the seed of the Jews, before whom you have begun to fall, you will not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him."

And while they were still speaking with him, the king's chamberlains came, and hurried to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared. (Esther 6:4-14)

Haman had no idea he was serving anti-Christ, but his pride deceived him into thinking he could wreak vengeance on a lowly Jew who would not bow to him. His fate was to be that which awaits all who serve anti-Christ.

Thinking he would be honored by Esther he went to the banquet with the king. There he not only learned of his fate, but created the circumstances by which he would meet that fate:

So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king again said to Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, "What is your petition, Queen Esther, and it shall be granted to you—and what is your request, and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom."

Then Esther the queen answered and said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given to me at my petition, and my people at my request, for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could not equal the king's damage."

Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said to Esther the queen, "Who is he, and where is he, that dares presume in his heart to do so?"

And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman."

Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

And the king, arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath, went into the palace garden. And Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen, for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.

Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine, and Haman had fallen upon the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he force the queen also before me in the house?"

As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, "Look, also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, stands in the house of Haman."

Then the king said, "Hang him on it."

So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath was pacified. (Esther 7:1-10)

That day the king gave Haman's household to Esther who placed Mordecai over it. Moreover, after Esther brought Mordecai to the king, Xerxes gave him his ring. Responding to Esther's plea for her people, Xerxes told them to write a decree rescinding his previous order, seal it with the king's ring, and have it posted throughout his kingdom. He also aided the Jews when anyone sought to harm them.

These events became the basis for the Jews' celebration of Purim, because Haman had cast Pur, the lot, to destroy them:

Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come to them, the Jews ordained and took upon themselves, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves to them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year, and that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.

Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim.

And he sent the letters to all the Jews, to the hundred twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry.

And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book. (Esther 9:26-32)

For the rest of his days Mordecai was next in power to Xerxes, and was recognized among all the Jews as a great man.

Although the Jews were protected by God for the rest of the testamental period of the prophets, anti-Christ continued to gain small victories, at least for some seasons, among them. One attempt to destroy Israel was through intermarriage with the heathen among whom they lived. Around 458 B.C., the prophet Ezra was raised up to confront that evil. Ezra made a plea to the people and to the rulers to put away their foreign wives, and all Israel complied.

Upon the death of Xerxes, his son Artaxerxes gained the throne, inheriting his father's troubles with Egypt and Greece, upon whom Xerxes had imposed stringent rule. Numerous rebellions had to be quelled. Yet Artaxerxes continued his benevolence toward the Jews, allowing them to continue building strength in their land. This was obviously God's hand in protecting and providing for His people as long as they continued in His Law. They were not perfect, but there were evidently a sufficient number who wished to be obedient to the true God.

Another man appointed by God to be in the right place at the right time was Nehemiah, the royal cupbearer to Artaxerxes—a position of great trust considering how often kings have been poisoned by unfaithful stewards within their palaces.

Yet anti-Christ was not idle in putting to work his own people. Those who opposed the building of the temple broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned its gates. Nehemiah records how his brother Hanani brought him the news of this latest setback to the Jews. Before approaching the king with his petition for the Jews he, like Esther, pleaded with YHWH through prayer and fasting.

And it happened that in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was in front of him. And I picked up the wine and gave it to the king. Now at no time before this had I been sad in his presence. Therefore the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart.”

Then I was very sorely afraid, and said to the king, “Let the king live forever. Why should my countenance not be sad when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies in waste, the its gates are consumed with fire?”

Then the king said to me, “For what do you make request?”

So I prayed to the God of Heaven. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you would send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ tombs, so that I may build it.”

And the king said to me (the queen also sitting by him), “For how long will your journey be, and when will you return?”

So it pleased the king to send me, and I set a time for him. Moreover I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, let letters be given to me for the governors beyond the river so that they may convey me over till I come into Judah. And a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king’s forest, so that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into.”

And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.. (Nehemiah 2:1-8)

In spite of Artaxerxes’ support, anti-Christ raised more enemies to resist the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Three men in particular resisted Nehemiah: Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian continually plotted to undermine the work God had commissioned, even threatening to report to the king that Nehemiah was acting rebelliously, planning to set himself up as king.

With threat of attack always present, Nehemiah commanded that the men work with their swords in their hands or by their sides. Neither did they remove their clothes except to wash them. The threats came to nothing because their enemies saw how strong they were and how determined to accomplish their work.

Space does not allow us to recount all that transpired for Israel to accomplish this task against great odds. Suffice it to say that no matter how strong the enemy, our God is far stronger. ❖